THE POST-FORMATIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN ISLAM—II: IV: THE PHILOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

نحمده ونصلي على رسوله الكريم

THE POST-FORMATIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN ISLAM—II*

FAZLUR RAHMAN

IV

THE PHILOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

The philosophical movement in Islam, whose fruits constitute one of the richest treasures of the Islamic intellectual culture and whose influence on the Western thought was so deep, palpable and enduring, was a continuity of the Mu'tazilites' experiences of rationalistic thinking during the second, third and the fourth centuries. The first great Muslim philosopher, al-Kindī (d. *circa* 260/873) had undoubtedly a Mu'tazillah background. The Mu'tazillah rationalism, however, can hardly be described as purely philosophical for in its main scope it was confined to theological problems. They were e.g. keenly interested in the problem of free-will but the centre of gravity of their thought was not this problem philosophically or absolutely speaking but largely in so far as it affected the concept of God, i.e. whether free-will was or was not compatible with the idea of a *just God.*

With the philosophers a wholly new era of Muslim civilization opens and one of the most brilliant chapters of all human thought as well. Free, absolutely free, activity of human reason extends its field at once to all corners of existence and life. It studies unfettered analyses and judges the data of all the physical, biological and human sciences. The Muslim philosophers include in their philosophical works, treatises on movement and space, the soul, the plants and the animals, astronomy, mathematics, music, and metaphysics. Very often a philosopher is also a great doctor and a scientist like al-Rāzī, Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd. The physical sciences treated of by the philosophers—unless they happen to be experimental scientists also—are not, strictly speaking "scientific"

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but rather philosophical. None the less, their works even in these fields are masterpieces of fine, speculative and strictly logical reasoning and they accepted whatever conclusions seemed to follow from this rational activity. Our concern just now, however, is only with that part of their teaching which impinges directly on religion and therefore interacted at points violently with the orthodox creed with tragic results immediately for philosophy but in the long run for orthodoxy itself. Let us turn at once to the religious aspects of the philosopher's thought.

The most fundamental fact about the religious thought of the philosphers—especially Ibn Sīnā whose doctrines have been historically the most important (because they were for the first time elaborated into a full-fledged system) is that *on all the points where the frontiers of religion and rational thought met, the two neither reached utterly different results, nor yet were they identical but seemed to run parallel to one another.* This happened not just on one point but *all along the line* where the traditional theology and philosophy faced one another. From this fact of systematic parallelism, the philosophers made the *saltus mortalis* and concluded (1) that philosophy and religion were ultimately tackling exactly the same questions, dealing with exactly the same facts and in exactly the same way, (2) that the Prophet was, therefore, primarily a philosopher, but (3) that since the Prophet's addressees were not the intellectual *èlite* but the masses, who could not understand the philosophic truth, the Prophetic Revelation naturally catered for their needs and "talked down" to their level in terms intelligible to them.

Religion had taught that the world was created by God by His sheer command "Be!" Man's reason has, for ages, been vexed by trying to understand how the world could be created out of nothing and how it could have been created *in time.* Although Aristotle is the first philosopher to have actually declared the cosmos as such to be eternal, i.e. uncreated, philosophers have usually assented to this view. Purely rationally speaking, however, an eternity of the world in the past is also quite inconceivable and full of absurdities and in Medieval times a process started in philosophy, which culminated in Kant but to which al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd and Thomas Aquinas had made no small contributions in their own way, declaring the problem to be rationally insoluble—a great philosophic tragedy, indeed. Ibn Sīnā had elaborated his own

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solution to this problem. By a very intricate process of thought which we have expounded elsewhere,[1] Ibn Sīnā effected a fundamental change both in the Aristotelian concept of the movement of the universe and the Neoplatonic concept of emanation and, having arrived at his theory of existence, he declared (1) that both the universe as a whole and everything therein derived its existence directly from God and (2) that the world as a whole was, nevertheless, eternal and was not "created" by God at any moment of time although it *depends* on God. He contended that the genuinely religious stake (which was absolutely rational) in this whole problem was not that the world should be "created out of nothing at a time" (*ḥādiṯ*) but that the world should be contingent, dependent upon God (*mumkin*).[2] Ibn Sīnā thereby explicitly accused the orthodox theologians of lack of discernment of the genuinely religious demands and of confusing the issues rationally. Whatever the philosophical mechanics of this theory of Ibn Sīnā, its net result is that God is the "ground" of the Universe and *explains* the latter ; without Him the world would be "groundless," unintelligible, irrational.

This problem and its solution provided Ibn Sīnā with the guiding and crucial experience for his philosophic thought on all the problems of traditional religion and proved decisive for his philosophic attitude to this whole sensitive region which he took very seriously. He came to realize that religion was not at all wrong, as against atheism and "naturalism," in asserting the idea of a God or Supreme Being ; further, it was also essentially right in asserting that this world depended on this God. And yet—Ibn Sīnā was equally led to believe—religion was most certainly incorrect if it literally asserted, as it seems to do, the *creatio ex nihilo* of the world. The perilous belief, therefore, became firmly implanted in his mind that *religious and philosophical truths are identically the same ; only religion, since it is not limited to the few but is for all, necessarily accommodates itself to the level of mass intelligence and is, therefore, a kind of philosophy for the masses and does not tell the naked truth but talks in parables.* A century later, his great successor Ibn Rushd, in his *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, put forward a semi-similar, semi-different view and came very near to asserting a theory of "two truths"—a religious one and a rational one. This theory of the "double truth" later became famous in the thirteenth-century Europe where it still falsely continues to be attributed to Siger of

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Brabantia, a famous thirteenth-century follower of Ibn Rushd's philosophy at the Paris University, whose doctrines were severely "condemned" by Thomas Aquinas. Actually, no one known to history has ever asserted this theory of "double truth".

Once this principle of parallelism between religion and philosophy was apparently accepted, it did not fail to be confirmed on many other points. Religion had taught that there would be a Day of Reckoning when bodies shall be resurrected. The philosophers, especially al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, rejected the idea of a physical resurrection on several grounds. Ibn Sīnā, who accepted physical resurrection in his ordinary philosophical works "on the basis of the *Sharī'ah*," wrote a special, esoteric treatise *al-Risālah al-Aḍḥawīyah* (so called because he wrote it in one morning), where he declared the whole idea of a physical resurrection "to be impossible". But the philosophers firmly believed in the survival of the soul and therefore in a spiritual hereafter with its *psychic* pleasures and pains. Al-Fārābī believed in the survival only of "good souls"; bad souls, according to him, simply get annihilated; he, therefore, only speaks of spiritual bliss and not of punishment in the Hereafter.[3] Here again Ibn Sīnā was struck by the philosophy-religion parallelism: *his* philosophy had confirmed that there was an after-life; religion taught resurrection of the flesh in the Hereafter; religion had to do this because it is aimed at the masses of "dullards"; otherwise religion is no more than philosophy.

It must, of course, he borne in mind that the parallelism that seems to emerge on all these fateful points between philosophy and religion is the result of the conscious approach of the philosophers towards religion. Otherwise, other philosophic views would have been possible. It would have been, for example, possible to hold that neither soul nor body can survive or be resurrected. On the other hand, if the philosophers had been a little more bold and Islam-minded it might not have been altogether impossible to hold philosophically that the body is resurrectible in some sense and that without it the soul means nothing. Indeed, Ibn Sīnā sometimes almost comes close to asserting a quasi-physical resurrection for "undeveloped souls".

But it is not this particular theory or that of the philosophers that constituted the serious problem for Islam, even though al-Ghazālī apparently thought that the philosophical doctrine of the eternity of the world was the most serious problem for Islam

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raised by the rationalists, since he devotes a lion's share of his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* to this question. What was really most serious, and something to which al-Ghazālī devotes precious little space in his refutation of the philosophers, is what the phenomenon of religion-philosophy parallelism led the philosophers to believe with regard to the mutual relationship of religion and philosophy. In particular, the most capital mistake made by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā was to assimilate religious or moral truth to intellectual or "natural" truth. In their theory of knowledge, when they treat of religious cognition, their statements, which are at points very profound and original, simply make no distinction whatsoever between higher religio-moral cognition and other forms of intellectual cognition. For them, a moral principle is, in its cognitive aspects, exactly like a mathematical proposition. They do not realize that religio-moral experience, although it certainly has a cognitive element, radically differs from other forms of cognition in the sense that it is full of *authority*, *meaning* and *imperiousness* for the subject whereas ordinary form of cognition is simply informative. A man who has a genuinely religious experience is automatically transformed by that experience. Because of this failure to recognize this difference and taking their stand firmly on the phenomenon of parallelism, the philosophers assimilated the Prophet to the philosopher, the prophetic experience to intellectual cognition (plus, of course, the capacity to influence people, which a philosopher does not possess). This line of thought further confirmed them in their thoroughly Hellenized idea of God—as a principle which "*explains*" this world, rather than a Creator who *directs* this world; as an intellectual formula rather than as a moral and dynamic imperative.

This was really and at bottom the centre of conflict between the Hellenizing philosophers and the representatives of the Islamic tradition. This conflict was felt and sensed by al-Ghazālī and more especially by Ibn Taymīyah in his *Kitāb al-Nubuwwāt* where the philosophers' 'inactive' principle is opposed to the acting, Commanding God of the Qur'ān.[4] But the conflict, although it was thus felt, was never fully and consciously formulated. If it had been formulated clearly with its implications, the wholesale attack on philosophy as such by the orthodoxy would perhaps not have occurred. It would have then been seen that, after all, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā's type of thought is not the only philosophy that is

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possible ; that certain failures may have characterized *this particular* philosophy, but philosophy as such need not be strangled and, indeed, that orthodoxy itself rested on certain assumptions which it would do well to intellectually formulate.

The truth, however, is that even the philosophers were not really aware of the centre of conflict between their thought and revealed religion. We have outlined just above their failure to develop a theory of knowledge that would do justice to religious facts and moral cognition. Indeed, when one scans the entire work of the Muslim philosophers, one is struck by the peculiar inattention shown to ethics. Certain treatises of certain minor philosophers on moral do not add up to much. It is widely believed by modern Western scholars that this is because the philosophers were afraid of producing a rival system of "do's" and "don'ts" to the *Sharī'ah* and so they left morals and the practical life to the *Sharī'ah*. There may be some truth in this, although it needs to be added that the philosophers were most probably too enamoured of their metaphysical heights to condescend to climb down to ethics. Yet, if only they had made the very assumptions of the *Sharī'ah*-law itself an object of serious study and thought, they might have come out with quite a different philosophy and the orthodoxy might have in turn been the richer for it instead of starving itself intellectually and ultimately spiritually by a one-sided unthinking attack on philosophy.

Intellectual liberalism is of the essence of a great and advancing culture. But for allowing latitude to the mind of man and trusting basically in its goodness, soundness and sanity, modern culture should commit suicide not merely in its liberal aspects but also its conservative side. For conservatism can remain meaningful and enlightened only when there is liberalism ; should conservatism become unenlightened (i.e. fail to see why it should be conservative, on what points and to what extent it should exert the pressure), the entire culture must decay. This is what unfortunately happened in Islam. If an al-Fārābī or an Ibn Sīnā had outraged, on certain points, the dogmatic theology and perhaps exceeded in interpreting the Qur'ān, the orthodoxy, in al-Ghazālī and others afterwards, outraged humanity as such including its own very being, by condemning all philosophy as such and its necessary instrument, the human reason.

One striking fact about the phenomenon of the rise of philoso-

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phy in Islam is that it was sporadic and individual and never took the form of a movement or a tradition expressing itself through established schools of thought. It was much too short-lived and took no enduring roots as a high-level, original thought-activity. There must have been several socio-economic and political reasons for the early death of philosophy as, for example, the political instability we have already described earlier. But one most fundamental and palpable reason is the fact that the orthodoxy, after the attack upon philosophy by al-Ghazālī, proscribed it completely and did not allow it to grow any further, or rather destroyed the very conditions for its growth. The orthodox treatment of philosophy is strongly reminiscent of their treatment of the doctrines of the Mu'tazilah. Just as the '*Ulamā*' had founded the science of *Kalām* to counter Mu'tazilah rationalism, so now they expanded the contents of *Kalām*-theology to reckon with the theses of the philosophers. We shall presently have a closer look at the contents of this extended *Kalām*. At about the same time the orthodox also developed fully their system of education and elaborated curricula after a process of *ad hoc* and sporadic teaching, whose beginnings reach back into the earliest times of Islam. Once they assumed firm control of education and schools, and established *Kalām* into a kind of pseudo-substitute for the genuine intellectualism which only philosophic thought could generate philosophy was effectively outlawed from the Muslim world.

Thus, the only places where thinkers could be engineered, viz., the *Madrasahs* were, from the very time of their systematic foundation in the world of Islam, swept bare of pure thought. Nevertheless, although there was no room for any high level teaching of philosophy in the *Madrasahs*, certain lesser and introductory compendia and commentaries were often taught to sharpen the minds of the pupils. Even outside the *Madrasahs* a certain amount of interest in philosophical commentaries did remain. Although all this never added up to very much in terms of original thought, it did keep the tension alive, and the orthodox, especially their right wing, kept up unabated pressure against this "anti-*Sharī'ah*" branch of learning. An ingenious and satirical poem written by 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Pahrārawī, an able scholar with a fluent pen but hitherto unknown to the world of scholarship (he belonged to the small village of Pahrār near Multān and died as late as 1239/1823-24), illustrates this orthodox attitude to philosophy very effectively.

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The poem reads :—

ا یـا علـماء ا لهند طـال بقـاء کم	و زال بفضل الله عنکـم بـلاء کم
رجـوتم بعلم العقل فـوز سعـادة	و انی لاخشی ان یخیب رجاء کم
فما فی تصانیف الا ثیر هـدایـة	ولا فی اشارات ابن سینـا شفاء کم
وما کان شرح الصدر للصدر شارحاً	بل ازداد منه فی الصدور صداء کم
و بـازغة لا ضوء فیها اذا بدت	و اظلـم منهـا کاللیـالی ذکاء کم
و سـلمکـم ممـا یـفیـد تـسـفلاً	و لیس بـه نحـو المعالی ارتقـاء کم
اخذتم علـوم الکفر شـرعـاً کأنما	فلا سفـة الیونان هم انبیاء کم

The author then goes on to admonish the "philosophy-stricken" scholars to treat their "rational ailment" with "*'ilm al-Shar'* — i.e. the *Ṣaḥīḥ* and *Ḥasan Ḥadīths* from the Prophet". For their interest and because they make a satirical play on the *titles* of some well-known philosophy texts and compendia, we give here a translation of the above verses :—

"O the '*Ulamā*' of India ! may you live long !
And, through God's grace, your affliction removed.
You hope, by rational knowledge, to attain to bliss ;
I am, indeed, fearful lest your hopes come to naught.
For there is no "Guidance"[5] in Athīr's works,
Nor any hope of your "Recovery"[5] in the "Allusions" of Ibn Sīnā.
The "Commentary of Ṣadr"[6] is no opener of the breasts—
Indeed, it augments the restlessness of your minds.
The "Brilliant Sun",[7] even when it shines, is without light ;
It has rendered your intelligence obscure and dark.
As for your "*Sullam*",[8] it is only good for descending ;
It offers little basis for ascension to heights.
You adopted infidel sciences as God's Command as though
The Greek philosophers were your prophets."

CHARACTER OF EDUCATION

The orthodox attitude to philosophy and to the "rational sciences" in generel leads us directly to a brief examination of the origin, development and nature of the Muslim educational system and its contents. Our intention is not to survey the growth of educational institutions in Islam nor to portray exhaustively the syllabi that were taught therein but to characterize, in broad terms, the Muslims' concept of knowledge, as it developed, in order to bring out its historical interaction with Islam.

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The Qur'ān has frequently used the term *'ilm* and its derivatives in the general and comprehensive sense of "knowledge" whether it is through learning or thinking or experience, etc. It follows from this that this would be the sense in which this word was used during the Prophet's time. In the generations after the Companions, however, Islam began to grow as a *tradition.* There is evidence that *'ilm* began to be used for knowledge which one acquires by learning, more particularly of the past generations (the Prophet, the Companions, etc.) while the exercise of understanding and thought on these traditional materials was termed *fiqh* (literally: understanding). The fact is not of small interest that the *'ilm-fiqh* pair corresponds in this early usage almost exactly to the *Ḥadīth-Sunnah* pair; *Ḥadīth* being the traditional materials while *Sunnah* being the deductions, on the basis of thought, from these materials.[9] This fact constitutes one of the strongest arguments—if we still need any—to prove that *Sunnah* for the early generations of Muslims, was not just the *Sunnah* of the Prophet but included all the legal points, decisions, etc. deduced from it by rational thought.

The essential point we wish to make here is that the term *'ilm* had early on received a traditionalist rather than a rational bias in Islamic history. Connected with this meaning of the term *'ilm*, i.e., of tradition and especially of what the Prophet was reported to have said or done, is the famous phrase "*ṭalab al-'ilm*" or "seeking of knowledge". Although later on in Islam and especially in modern times, the phrase has acquired a general application once again, it cannot be historically doubted that it arose among the traditionalist circles with a definite meaning: *ṭalab al-'ilm* meant a long and arduous process of travelling from place to place and country to country, sitting at the feet of a traditionalist master and acquiring from him his store of tradition. Later on and in other circles the application of the term "knowledge" widens, e.g. in the well-known adage: "Knowledge is of two kinds: that of religious matters and that of human bodies (i.e., medicine)."[10] As for the term "*fiqh*", we have seen that early on it was used to signify thought, understanding, etc., i.e., a process. Later, however, when the legal system grew, this term came to be applied to law, not so much as a process of understanding legal issues but as a body of legal knowledge, the *concrete result* of legal thought. Still later, after the fourth century or thereabouts, the term "*fiqh*" ceased

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altogether to have any reference to understanding or thought which, indeed, came to be forbidden, and was exclusively reserved for the *body* of legal knowledge produced by the earlier generations. There is also some evidence that when *Kalām*-theology was formulated, sometimes the word *'ilm* was applied to it exclusively in contradistinction to *fiqh*. Thus, the meanings given to these terms in the early stages came to be almost reversed but not permanently.

Orthodox Muslims did not develop systematic higher education in the early centuries. Their schools were only of a primary level where children were taught the Qur'ān, reading and writing and also often the rudiments of arithmetic. The higher education centred around personalities rather than colleges. Pupils would move from one renowned Shaykh to another and obtain certificates. The subjects studied were exclusively traditional. For lack of organization, there was no method of systematic feeding of this higher education from the primary stages: the two were entirely separate. The first important place of learning created by the central government under al-Ma'mūn's orders—the famous '*Bayt al-Ḥikmah*' or the "House of Wisdom" at Baghdād was captured by the Mu'tazilah rationalists and, in fact, the arm of the state was virulently turned against the orthodoxy. Similarly, the Shī'ah made organised efforts to propagate their views and created schools, the most famous of which, al-Azhar, established by the Fāṭimids, came under the orthodox control only after the Ayyūbīds overthrew the Fāṭimids.

From these experiences and challenges from different groups, the orthodox '*Ulamā*' learnt the lesson and set about to organize and control education. The first really great orthodox college was created by the Saljūq *wazīr* Niẓām al-Mulk in the eleventh century (A.C.) at which the illustrious al-Ghazālī served also as professor. This was the crucial, formative stage of the Muslim higher education. But at the same time occurred the philosophic movement discussed in the last section. The philosophers, who were also almost invariably scientists and scientific thinkers, were attacked by the orthodoxy. This rendered the orthodoxy's attitude especially towards positive knowledge on the whole extremely unhealthy. The result was that the '*Ulamā*' were able to save intact their heritage which, in its basic structure of ideas, is undoubtedly faithful to Islam, but at a great cost: it robbed the

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orthodox content of education and thought of the very breath of life. No structure of ideas can ever hope to make good or even command respect for a long time—let alone be fruitful—unless it is in constant interaction with living, growing stream of positive and scientific thought. It is a sheer delusion to imagine that by stifling free, positive thought one can save religion for by doing so religion itself gets starved and impoverished. The result was that after a few centuries, the real "Dark Ages" of Islam, the orthodoxy was left with little more than an empty shell, a threadbare formal structure with hardly any content.

Al-Ghazālī, in his *Munqidh*, had protested that since the philosophers were also scientists and since some of their philosophical theses conflicted with religion, many ignorant people took pride in wantonly rejecting even their scientific propositions which were obviously true. In this statement, al-Ghazālī had shown remarkable power of discernment and had rebuked the cheap defenders of religion against reason. But al-Ghazālī also used the same argument the other way around and said that since many people were impressed by the scientific thought of the philosophers, they also began to look upon their philosophical theses as indubitable truth and gave unqualified credence to them. This statement too was absolutely correct. But from this, al-Ghazālī drew the fatal conclusion that, therefore, people should be discouraged from studying even the scientific works of the philosophers. This was the first blow the orthodoxy explicitly and formally dealt to positive knowledge and ultimately also to itself and it was subsequently echoed by innumerable representatives of the orthodoxy down the ages.

The brilliant eighth (fourteenth) century jurist al-Shāṭibī lays it down as a fundamental principle in his *Kitāb al-Muwāfaqāt* that purely intellectual disciplines such as philosophic thought must not be cultivated since they are not related to action and are, therefore, dangerous. He outright rejects the plea that even pure thought is necessary for ultimately it does affect the formulation of the objectives of human action.[11] He categorically denies that reason has any primary role in law-making or even in the formulation of the moral imperatives,[12] even though he himself has exercised a great deal of rational power in fixing the "goals of the *Sharī'ah* (*aghrāḍ al-Sharī'ah*)". Ibn Taymīyah's vituperations against philosophy and rationalism in general are well known. Shaykh Aḥmad

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Sirhindī, the important seventeenth century reformer and original thinker, to whose work we have briefly alluded before in these pages,[13] himself unreservedly condemns both philosophy and the sciences. Philosophers he ridicules; about arithmetic he says that one should not waste time on it but only learn enough to calculate shares of inheritance and to determine the direction of the Ka'bah. Geometry he declares to be most useless: what good is it, he asks, to know that the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles?[14] We could multiply the catalogue of the orthodox condemnations of positive thought and science but the illustrations given here should suffice.

The names cited here are august, indeed. These personalities have made positive contributions to the spiritual history of Islam whose importance may be said to range between 'immense' and 'capital'. Yet, towards positive knowledge their attitude can be characterized only as fatal. In their criticisms of actual philosophers and of actual products of reason one must agree. We ourselves have underlined the excesses to which certain philosophical doctrines had gone. But when the orthodoxy condemned—generation after generation—human reason as such, this extreme and wholesale attack was not only not healthy but downright suicidal. Free-thought, by its very nature, is bound to exceed on certain points; it is a consequence of its very life. Its remedy is not to stifle it but to keep on criticizing it. Intellectualism is something so frail that in shackles it surely dies. In other words, "free-thought" and "thought" have exactly the same meaning; you cannot remove freedom and then hope that thought would survive. In sum, even in this field what happened in Islam was what we have repeatedly noticed in the last article as happening to Islam in general: *Islam was subjected to extremes and the orthodoxy, as though by some inexorable law, felt impelled to crush positive thought out of existence.* A very hard and fast distinction was thus made between the *Sharī'ah* and the non-*Sharī'ah* sciences or the "religious" and the secular fields of learning, which caused an incalculable deterioration in the quality and standards of Islamic education and thought itself.

It is essential to observe the principle of integration of knowledge in order to keep thought and education healthy (to some extent this is also the danger in the present age of specialization which is being kept in check so far only by the presence of a

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small number of outstanding people who are both specialists and thinkers). Having effectively banished the rational and scientific disciplines, the '*Ulamā*' incorporated certain elements of philosophy, especially logic, in their theology as a preparatory science or as an "instrumental" science. In face of the philosophical theses impinging on religion, the scope of *Kalām* was further enlarged to include formal treatments of those theses—such as Prophethood, Resurrection of the bodies, Creation, etc. Henceforward the doctrine of atomism in physics becomes a part and parcel of Muslim *Kalām*-theology since, it was thought that, atomism does not require causation and hence allowed for the direct Finger of God to interfere in every event. All this is clearly set out in the theological work of al-Shahrastānī, the first formal theologian, that appeared after al-Ghazālī's attack on the philosophers.

As we pointed out in our previous article, philosophy, when attacked by the orthodox '*Ulamā*', went underground and, so far as much of its content was concerned, it found a spacious home within theosophic ṣūfism. In ṣūfism it even cut itself loose from the checks that reason had imposed upon it. Now, ṣūfism was, as a whole, strongly opposed to education and threw its massive weight on the wholesale abandonment of intellectual culture in the interests of its spiritual "path". Such an attitude, when restricted to as infinitesimal minority, may not be harmful but since ṣūfism became a mass movement since the twelfth century, its effects have been simply devastating on the intellectual life of Islam. Since the twelfth century, the best and most creative minds of Islam have been drifting away from the orthodox system of education to ṣūfism. One has only to pick up any collection of ṣūfī biogrophies to see how many people "left formal, external education" and joined the ṣūfī ranks. The '*Ulamā*' were left with little more than dry bones, the real currents of life having escaped their system and taken their own way—far more dangerous than that of the Mu'tazilites or the philosophers.

But within the religious system, which thus came to constitute both the entire scope and the sole preserve of the *Madrasahs*, there remained curious fundamental inconsistencies both among the Sunnīs and the Shī'ah—inconsistencies which could have been removed only by further growth through a critical and constructive free-thought. On one important point such contradiction in the Sunnī system was pinpointed by Ibn Taymīyah himself. While

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protesting against the doctrine of determinism in Sunnī theology (*Kalām*), he pointed out that one and the same person, when he is a theologian, believes in a rigorous determinism and impotency of the human will, but when he behaves as a *Faqīh*—either in the capacity of a *Qāḍī* or a *Muftī*, he has to assume freedom and efficacy of the human will.[15] This is a fundamental anomaly and yet theology is supposed to be an intellectual defence of the creed and the postulates of *Fiqh* as the "crown of the *Sharī'ah* sciences". Such a position is surely a result of the fact that intellectualism was never owned and integrated into the religious system. Indeed, it was spurned under the claim of the "self-sufficiency of the *Sharī'ah*-sciences, especially of their crown."[16] But the Shī'ah system is even more anomalous. It is to be admitted in all fairness that the Shī'ah law puts greater emphasis on the "intention" of the agent on several points than many other schools of Sunnī law and this seems to be a consequence of their theology which espouses freedom of the human will. But, to begin with, what value do human mind, conscience and free-will have alongside of an infallible Imām? An infallible Imām, strictly speaking, does not need humans but automatons as his instruments. Secondly, it is strange that the Shī'ah emphasis on human freedom did not lead to any new legal postulates and principles and, in the field of legal thought, the Shī'ah are not at all any different from the Sunnīs. It is, indeed, a curious phenomenon of Muslim religious history that even the Mu'tazilah who claimed to derive moral imperatives (*ḥusn wa qubḥ* = right and wrong) directly from reason did not differ in legal matters at all from the rest of the Community, although law is no more than application of morals to a society. We are not, of course, supporting the Mu'tazilah stand on morals but simply noting and trying to analyse and understand contradictions. For us, a rational understanding of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* is the only reliable method for arriving at moral imperatives and legal enactments.

But quite apart from the content of these sciences and what was taught, the question as to *how* it was taught is equally important. Here we find that the emphasis was placed on *books* rather than on subjects or disciplines. A pupil learnt not *Fiqh* but *Hidāyah* or some other work; he studied or rather went through *al-Bayḍāwī* and not the science of Qur'ānic exegesis as such, and so on. This method, which was quite congenial to the general

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intellectual temper, further strengthened the process of learning things by rote rather than grasping them by understanding, criticising them and analysing them. There were occasional criticisms[17] of this educational system, especially of its content by eminent men but to no avail. This does not mean that Islam did not produce men of original thought and of high intellectual calibre verging on genius even in the later centuries. But their number has been very few, indeed ; and they rose through their own native ability rather than having been engineered in the *Madrasahs*. Nor do we wish to say that a good educational system always produces geniuses : intellectual prodigies are, indeed, relatively a rare commodity. But the function of a good educational system is to keep the *normal intellectual level* high enough both in the interests of the normal products to realize the best in them and to give a "take-off" advantage to the exceptionally gifted ones. The trouble with the Muslim system was that its normal standards were kept at a very low point so that it neither produced good normalities nor afforded a "take-off" advantage to the exceptional cases as they deserved. Indeed, many a modern scholar have been led by this phenomenon to ask the question whether intellectual barrenness is not a concomitant of Islam, and a few more dogmatic ones have even answered it in the affirmative.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing series of articles we have sketched out the fundamental developments in the rise and evolution of Islamic methodology, i.e., the framework of principles within which Islamic thinking takes place. These principles are (besides, of course, the Qur'ān) *Sunnah*, *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā'*. We found that, in early history, the latter two concepts were intimately bound up not only with one another but also with the concept of *Sunnah* which, starting from the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, became an on-going creative process of interpretation and elaboration which was given the sanction of *Ijmā'*. This process of creativity stopped, however, grinding slowly to a standstill when this living *Sunnah* began to be cast in *Ḥadīth* form and attributed to the Prophet. In this process, the internal differences of opinion on legal, moral and political issues played a decisive role. The process, which began perhaps around the turn of the first and the second centuries, gathered a terrific momentum during the second century and

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reached its fruition in the third century. So strong was the power of this movement that the older schools of legal opinion based on free-thought had to accept al-Shāfi'ī's contention that even an isolated *Ḥadīth*, attested only by one chain of narrators, must be given overriding authority over rational personal opinion and even practice or *Ijmā'*. Al-Shāfi'ī is asked as to why he sets the criterion for establishing the authenticity of *Ḥadīth* lower than for establishing evidence in a court since in the latter case at least two witnesses are usually required while, for *Ḥadīth*, al-Shāfi'ī was prepared to accept the evidence only of one person. Al-Shāfi'ī's reply is that whereas in a court case witnesses may be interested in the issue one way or the other and, in any case, their evidence produces consequences that may affect some people adversely and others favourably, this presumption does not exist with regard to the Prophetic *Ḥadīth* in which people would be only objectively interested and whereby the entire Community uniformly affected.[18] Since this reply is patently unsatisfactory in view of the obvious fact that people are motivated to give currency to their views by involving the Prophetic authority, wherever possible, it only reveals the force of the *Ḥadīth*-movement itself.

After all, the possible views on political, moral and legal matters had been projected back to the Prophet, a battle of ideas began within Islam which was finally resolved by the efforts of the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* who, throughout the third century, collected *Ḥadīth* that largely expressed the views of the majority and as such may be regarded as expressing, as a whole, the spirit of the Prophetic teaching. It is these views of the "middle-of-the-road" majority (*Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah*), with a certain marginal latitude towards the right and the left, that, thanks to the activity of the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, crystallized the "orthodox" point of view and led, during the fourth century—at the hands of al-Ash'arī and al-Māturīdī—to the formulation of the orthodox creed and theology. This entire development, remarkable for the cohesion of its internal structure, resulted in creating a sense of equilibrium and balance that is probably unique in the history of mankind in its gigantic dimensions. It was this fact that was responsible for the sudden flowering of the brilliant Muslim civilization.

But the basis on which this equilibrium had been built did not allow further growth and development. In every society, of course, there must be an element of conservatism for mere social

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change and growth cannot even take place without the controlling hand which supplies the element of continuity amidst change. But just as no society can live on mere change, similarly no society can survive for long by mere conservatism. And yet the very basal structure of the Islamic methodology, as it developed, made for nothing but conservatism. The content of the Muslim system, backed as it was by the *Ḥadīth*, came to have the character of an eternal truth, unchangeable and irrevisable. Yet, as we have shown, this content arose actually in history and has its full significance only within that historical, situational context. Divorced from that situation and eternalized, it blocked and could not fail to block progress in all the spheres of life reviewed by us briefly in the last part: political and moral principles, spiritual life, intellectual activity and education. When the orthodoxy thus incarcerated itself, unhealthy and un-Islamic forces took over and swept across the entire body of the Muslim world.

Since the eighteenth century, Muslim society has been gripped by an acute sense of deterioration and failure, often varying on a crisis. During the eighteenth century, various movements started in different parts of the Muslim world to regenerate Muslim society. This continued during the nineteenth century. The essential diagnosis arrived at by the leaders of these reform movements asserts that Muslims have reached this stage through ceasing to be "pure" Muslims since the purity of pristine Islam has been compromised with un-Islamic accretions both in doctrine and practice. In so far as these efforts have gone to liberate Islam from the numbing Medieval influences, their influence has been certainly salutary in activating creative forces and in this connection the term "*Ijtihād*" has once again assumed great importance, at least in theory. To begin with, these very movements (and especially that of Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb in the Arabian Peninsula), which are now regarded generally as good orthodoxy, were attacked bitterly by the conservative medieval forces and the echoes of this struggle are still far from being dead. Indeed, a very large part of Islam still suffers from those very superstitions and un-Islamic accretions against which these movements rose in revolt.

But even where these movements have been successful, they have hardly solved the problem of deterioration facing the Muslim society, although their influence may be largely taken to have

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prepared the ground for such a solution. The reason for *their* failure is that they take "pristine Islam" i.e., the Qur'ān and the Prophetic *Sunnah* in too simple, narrow and static terms. In sum, they believe that if the Muslims were to "follow," i.e., repeat and reproduce exactly what their seventh-century forefathers did, they would recover their rightful position "with God", i.e., both in this world and the next. But the big question is: How can a piece of history be literally repeated? The only sense, therefore, that this dictum can yield is that Muslims must perform and enact in the twentieth century that whose moral and spiritual dimensions match those of the Muslims' performance in the seventh and eighth centuries. But this means not just a simple "return" to the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* as they were acted in the past but a true *understanding* of them that would give us guidance *to-day*. A simple return to the past is, of course, a return to the graves. And when we go back to the early Muslim generations, this process of a living understanding of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* is exactly what we find there.

Since the nineteenth century, the Muslim world has felt the impact of the West—first political and then cultural. The political hegemony of the West has largely receded and, in parts, is still receding although the securing of political ends through economic ascendency is now the rule of the day. But the real problem of the Muslim society is to assimilate, adapt, modify and reject the forces generated *within its own fabric* by the introduction of new institutions—of education, of industry, of communication, etc.—according as these forces are purely good, necessary evils, or positively harmful. The new forces have an ethic of their own and a simple return to the past is certainly no way to solve this problem—unless we want to delude ourselves. But recourse to the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* in order to get therefrom an understanding of, and guidance for, solving our new problems will undoubtedly meet the situation. This is because the Qur'ān and the Prophet's activity guided and were actually involved in society-building. Besides, therefore, certain general principles that lie enunciated in the Qur'ān and certain Prophetic precepts, their *actual* handling of social situations is fraught with meaning for us. But the meaning is not that we should repeat that very situation now, which is an absurd task, but rather to draw lessons from this concrete historic paradigm.

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NOTES

1. See my chapter on Ibn Sīnā in the forthcoming work *History of Muslim Philosophy*, edited by M. M. Sharif, being published by Otto Harrossowitz, Wiesbaden, West Germany; and also my contribution *Philosophy and Orthodoxy* to the Harry Wolfson *Festschrift* published by the Jewish Academy of America, New York, 1962 (?).
2. *Kitāb al-Najāt*, Cairo, 1938, pp. 213-14.
3. See his *al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*, ed. A. Nadir, Beirut, 1959, p. 118. As I have shown in my *Prophecy in Islam*, London, 1958, this belief, which is certainly not Islamic, comes from the Hellenic sources, although al-Fārābī tries to quote the Qur'ān in his support.
4. Ibn Taymīyah, *Kitāb al-Nubuwwāt*, Cairo, 1346 A.H., p. 168, lines 4-23.
5. "Guidance to Wisdom" (*Hidāyat al-Ḥikmah*) is a well-known work of Athīr al-Dīn 'Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Abharī (d. 663/1264). The two names in quotations—*al-Shifā'* and *al-Ishārāt*—are the famous works of Ibn Sīnā.
6. The linguistic point here is that the Arabic "*Sharḥ al-Ṣadr*" can also mean "an opening of the breast", i.e., illumination of the mind besides meaning "the Commentary of Saḍrā" (Mullā Ṣadrā) on Ibn Sīnā.
7. "The Brilliant Sun—*al-Shams al-Bāzīghah*" by Mullā Maḥmūd of Jawnpūr, (see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., s. v. *al-Fārūkī*).
8. *Sullam*=a stair-case or a flight of steps, is the name of a famous text by Muḥibb Allāh of Bihār (see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed, s. v. *al-Bihārī*).
9. That *Ḥadīth* meant the traditional materials whereas *Sunnah* signified the deduction of *practical norms* from these materials by the exercise of understanding, can be illustrated by the following examples: "'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Mahdī (d. 198 A.H.) is reported to have said that Sufyān al-Thawrī was an authority (*imām*) on *Ḥadīth* but not on *Sunnah* and that the opposite was true of al-Awzā'ī; Mālik combined in himself both types of expert and masterly qualities." See al-Zurqānī, *apud* I, Goldziher, *Muhammadanische Studien*[2], 1961, vol. II, p. 12. Similarly, Abū Dāwūd (*apud* Goldziher, *ibid.*, p. 11, footnote 6), after narrating a *Ḥadīth* about a person who kills an animal during the state of *iḥrām*, quotes Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal as saying: "There are five *Sunnahs* (i.e., points of law) that follow from this *Ḥadīth*."
10. This must have naturally occurred after the introduction of medical knowledge for the term *abdān* used here means human or living bodies as opposed to the term *ajsām*. It also underlines the utilitarian intent of the statement in singling out medicine from among all the sciences.
11. *K. al-Muwāfaqāt*, Cairo, 1302 A. H. vol. I, p. 16. *The Fifth Proposition*, especially, p. 19.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 11, *The Third Proposition*.
13. *Islamic Studies*, I/4, p. 21, line 38ff.
14. *Maktūbāt*, vol. I, No. 266. We are told there: "Among their (the philosophers') firm and sure sciences is mathematics which is utterly meaningless and absolutely useless."
15. Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū'ah al-Rasā'il al-Kubrā*, vol. I, Cairo, 1323 A. H., the short treatise entitled *Fi'l-amr wa'l-irādah*, pp. 361-2.

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16. See al-Ījī's *Mawāqif*, with al-Jurjānī's commentary, vol. I, *Introduction*, where the point of the self-sufficiency of *'Ilm al-Kalām* is fervently argued. The point at issue is whether a general question like the existence of God should be discussed in *Kalām*-theology or should be entrusted to a prior science like Metaphysics. The latter view is rejected as this would imply that even the "crown of the *Sharī'ah* sciences" is not self-sufficient.
17. See the chapter on Education in our forthcoming book *Islām*, being published by Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London.
18. Al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risālah*, ed. Shākir, Cairo, 1309, p. 372ff. especially pp. 391-3 ; see also p. 373, where al-Shāfi'ī states categorically: "In *Ḥadīth* I accept the report of a single person and (even) of a single woman whereas I accept neither of these as evidence in a court. Again, in *Ḥadīth* I accept, 'So-and-so told me' provided he is not a forger, but as court evidence I will accept nothing but 'I heard,' 'I saw' or, 'He made me a witness of'." On the same page, however, al-Shāfi'ī states that sometimes he would refuse to accept *Ḥadīths* from people whose evidence would be accepted in court because *Ḥadīth*-transmission can produce great changes in *Ḥadīth*-content and it is important to use the right words to convey the meaning. See also al-Shāfi'ī's rather curious argument in his *Ikhtilāf al-Ḥadīth* (published on the margin of *K. al-Umm*, VII) p. 12ff. that if people accepted single person's reports about the Prophet during his life-time, such acceptance became all the more necessary after the Prophet's death. Al-Shāfi'ī's point apparently is that a person could, without disadvantage, reject a report about the Prophet during the latter's life-time since he could go back to the original source but that after the Prophet's death the original source has been removed. But it is obvious that this argument can be turned the other way around with a far greater force since after his death the Prophet can no longer deny false reports about him.

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